

Eastern Indiana: where family fun never ends.

By Sally Campbell Grout

It's an undisputed fact that kids don't want to be in the car any longer than they have to. But before you regale them with stories of how tough you had it ("In my day, we didn't have movies in the minivan...and I had to share a seat with my brother...") just do them a favor. Stop and have some fun. This is especially easy to do if you're traveling through Eastern Indiana, where you'll find a family-friendly destination around every corner.

Make history more fun. (Yes, you can.)

Hearing too many complaints about history homework? Show them how interesting history can be when you experience it up close and personal.

One of the nation's—and the world's—most important historic figures, Abraham Lincoln, was born in Kentucky and grew up in Southern Indiana. But today, you can find a huge collection of Lincoln memorabilia in Fort Wayne. The Lincoln Museum (260-455-3864) houses one of the world's largest private collections dedicated to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, and includes scores of period artifacts, Lincoln family belongings, manuscript collections, and more. Students will also be inspired by the Levi Coffin House State Historic Site in Fountain City (765-847-2432). Here, in this eight-room house, nearly 2,000 runaway slaves found refuge with the Coffin family on their journey to Canada.

A different chapter in Indiana history will be fun for the "Hot Wheels" collectors in the family. Car buffs of all ages will love the full-sized cars and trucks at museums throughout the area. At the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum (260-925-1444), you can see more than 100 sleek, luxurious, and classic cars in the 1930s art deco headquarters of the Auburn Automobile Company. Adjacent to the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum is the National Automotive and Truck Museum of the United States, known as NATMUS (260-925-9100). Along with cars and trucks, you'll find models, toys, motorcycles, racing memorabilia, and even gas and oil pumps. American Heritage Village (260-927-9144) is a 200,000-square-foot building housing a World War II victory museum and the Kruse classic car museum.

Want to see more? Head over to Kokomo. Here, the City of Firsts Automotive Heritage Museum (765-454-9999) displays more than 100 vintage automobiles, Indiana industrial artifacts, and local memorabilia. The Elwood Haynes Museum (765-456-7500) is the home of the inventor and the man who gave us "America's First Car." The collection includes furnishings, industrial displays, and four vintage Haynes cars. And in

Anderson, the collection at the Historic Military Armor Museum (765-649-TANK) includes vehicles from World War I to the present.

After all those autos, how about doing a complete about face, and getting a feeling of what life is like without them? Amishville USA (260-589-3536) in Berne was once a 120-acre farm where many families were born and raised. In the late 1960s, when the Amish family that resided on the farm moved out of state, the farm got a “second career” as an attraction to teach visitors about the Amish. Today, Amishville USA offers an authentic Amish horse tour, buggy rides, the Essen Platz Restaurant, a working gristmill, and even modern and primitive camping. The gift shop sells such tempting items as Amish-made quilts, rockers, and dolls, along with homemade bread, noodles, and apple butter.

If your kids can't imagine staying in a hotel without a pool, you might want to show them the Huddleston Farmhouse Inn Museum (765-478-3172) in Cambridge City. This restored 1841 stopping place served 19th century travelers along the historic National Road. One of America's earliest roads, the National Road was constructed between 1828 and 1834, and established a settlement pattern across Indiana. Today, the road is still hard at work as US 40. Indiana's Historic National Road Driving Tour Guide (765-478-3172) is a great way to wind your way through towns that flourished because of the National Road.

Interesting animals your little critters will love.

Another fact about kids: they love animals. Here are a couple of great places in the area to meet them.

The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo (260-427-6800) offers 40 acres of fun and adventure in areas such as African Veldt, Australian Adventure, Indonesian Rainforest, and the Central Zoo. After all that exploring, relax on one of the zoo's fun rides, including the Zoo Train, the Endangered Species Carousel, the African Safari Ride, a Pony Ride, or the Dugout Canoe ride through the Australian Adventure.

At ME's Zoo in Parker City (765-468-8559), home to more than 300 animals, you can see tigers, leopards, bears, monkeys, birds, and a petting zoo. On weekends, kids can take camel and pony rides. (Visit soon; ME's Zoo closes September 25, 2005 and reopens in April.) In Albion, Black Pine Animal Park (260-636-7383) serves double duty as a sanctuary for rescued and retired animals and as a zoo that lets visitors seem them up-close. Meet exotic and endangered animals, including lions, tigers, chimpanzees, monkeys, leopards, birds, and reptiles. Black Pine Animal Park is open from May through October.

Put down the books and have some fall fun.

Make fall mean more than back-to-school this year. Eastern Indiana is filled with places that are sure to make your kids smile. Start with rides on a couple of fun railroads. In Connersville, the Whitewater Valley Railroad (765-825-2054) is a historic railroad built of a towpath of the Whitewater Canal; it takes you to Metamora, an 1830s town and state historic site. Along with its regular train rides, Whitewater Valley Railroad has special event trains, including the Fall Foliage Train, the Pumpkinliner, and the Santa Claus Express. In Knighthstown, the CKS Railroad (765-345-5561) offers a 1-hour, 10-mile round-trip train ride. Annual events include Pumpkin Patch Runs and Live Train Robberies.

Eastern Indiana also fills the calendar with fall festivals. Don't miss events include Huntington's Forks of the Wabash Pioneer Festival (260-359-8937), a celebration of Hoosier life in the mid-1800s, September 24-25, 2005; Marion's Mississinewa 1812 (800-822-1812), the largest War of 1812 living history event in the United States, October 7-9, 2005; and Ligonier's Pumpkin Fantasyland (260-894-4498), where you'll find pumpkins, gourds, hayrides, and refreshments, October 1-31, 2005.

Museums so fun, you'd think kids designed them.

Your kids may visit a museum on a field trip this year, but you'll have fun exploring these Eastern Indiana destinations with them at your family's own pace. In Muncie, two great kid-friendly museums are sure to please kids and parents. The National Model Aviation Museum (800-435-9262) is a 1,000-acre international model aviation center. Exhibits and hands-on displays represent more than 200 years of aeromodeling history, including pull-string helicopters predating the Wright Brothers, modern turbine jet aircraft, and plenty that fits on the timeline in between. At the Muncie Children's Museum (765-286-1660) exhibits include a Dino Dig, a Garfield exhibit, Nutrition Kitchen, and the Barnyard, among others.

At Science Central in Fort Wayne (260-424-2400), kids play and learn at exhibits such as the Mind's Eye Gallery (home of the Confusion-Illusion room), the Measurement Gallery (where kids can learn, among other things, how many gallons of water are in their bodies), the Prediction Gallery (a great spot for future meteorologists), and more. Supervised exhibits give them a chance to see what it feels like to jump with 1/6 of the earth's gravity, slide down a giant yellow slide, and even ride a High-rail bicycle (if you're at least 50 inches tall). Kids Central is a special area with 20 more hand-on exhibits made especially for two- through seven-year-olds and their grown-ups.

Tasty treats.

All that exploring is bound to leave everyone in the family ready for a snack. The perfect stop: Abbott's Candy Shop in Hagerstown (765-489-

4442). The Abbott family knows a thing or two about making candy; after all, they've been at it since the 1890s. Today's treats include caramels and chews, chocolates, cream puffs, butterscotch, brittle, and even sugar-free candies. Group tours are available by appointment.

For something from the actual food groups, visit Orchard Hill Farms in Kendallville (260-347-3682), where they grow more than 30 apple varieties. Other produce you might find here includes peaches, pears, cherries, and pumpkins. You can also take home jelly, syrup, cider, honey, and other items.

To discover more family and fall fun in Eastern Indiana and throughout the state, visit enjoyindiana.com.